

U.N. Human Rights Council Holds Minute's Silence for Chavez

(Reuters) - The [United Nations](#)' main human rights forum observed a minute's silence on Wednesday for the late Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez whose record it has often criticized over the years.

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By Stephanie Nebehay

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<http://www.reuters.com/article/2013/03/06/us-venezuela-chavez-un-idUSBRE9250GH20130306>

The U.N. Human Rights Council has voiced repeated concerns about freedom of expression, lack of independence of the judiciary, restrictions on activists, and arbitrary detentions in [Venezuela](#) under Chavez who died on Tuesday.

The ambassador of [Cuba](#) - which has declared three days of mourning for its ally Chavez - led diplomats in Geneva in observing the minute's silence.

"On behalf of the Latin American and Caribbean states, we wish to [express](#) our deep solidarity with the people and government of [Venezuela](#), particularly the family members and friends of Commandante Chavez," Ambassador Anayansi Rodriguez Camejo said.

"Chavez was key in Latin America's advance towards its second independence. He worked tirelessly not only for his people, but for the betterment of the nations of Latin America and the Caribbean," she said.

Under Chavez, Venezuela achieved most of the ambitious U.N. targets for improving health and education, known as the Millennium Development Goals, Cuba's envoy said.

"Chavez has not died, he didn't enter history yesterday, he entered history a decade ago when he began the Bolivarian Revolution and the struggle for real Latin American integration," she said.

Swiss Ambassador Alexandre Fasel, one of the Council's vice presidents, said: "We reiterate on behalf of the Council our condolences to the people and government of Venezuela at the death of Hugo Chavez."

Venezuela became one of the council's 47 members this year, under a system where member countries are selected by the U.N. General Assembly. Western states expect it to vote along similar lines of [Cuba](#) on issues such as [Syria](#) and [North Korea](#), now that its Caribbean ally is no longer a member.

The Council, which is holding its main annual four-week session, on Tuesday discussed cases of arbitrary detention, including that of Venezuelan judge Maria Lourdes Afiuni Mora.

Afiuni has been held since December 2009 and was raped in detention, independent U.N. experts said last month. She was jailed after allowing the release of a businessman charged with subverting currency controls, saying his pre-trial detention was longer than generally allowed under Venezuelan law.

"Judge Afiuni's situation is an emblematic case of reprisal for having cooperated with one of the U.N.'s human rights organs," Margaret Sekaggya, U.N. special rapporteur on human rights defenders, said in a February 14 statement.

Venezuela's delegation on Tuesday denounced her "fraudulent activities and refusal to appear before the court."

(This story corrects identity of speaker in 8th paragraph to Swiss vice president of council, not Polish president)

(Reporting by Stephanie Nebehay; Editing by Robin Pomeroy and Kevin Liffey)